

EL CAJON

STATE



Incorporated 1912

OF THE CITY 2021-22

December 14th | 6:30 p.m.

Ronald Reagan Community Center
195 East Douglas Avenue

2022 State of the City Address

(December 14, 2021)

Welcome . . .

I am happy to report that the City of El Cajon has emerged from the past two years of COVID-19 struggles as strong as ever. In fact, I am pleased to announce that the State of the City is in **excellent condition**.

We could spend hours reviewing the City's accomplishments over the past year, but I want to highlight only a few tonight. I will also address the ongoing challenges our community faces as well as solutions.

I appreciate my fellow City Council colleagues. I believe we are a collegial group and because of this, we have accomplished much and are focused on our community.

Earlier this year, the City Council came together and identified specific priorities for us and the community to focus on in 2021 and 2022.

Let me summarize the top five priorities:

- 1) Communication/Civic Engagement,
- 2) Homelessness,
- 3) Public Safety,
- 4) Economic Development, and
- 5) Focusing on City beautification.

From these priorities, we developed a series of goals, which staff briefed us on earlier today. I am pleased to say that we are making tremendous headway.

I look forward to the chance to gather again in January for our next goal setting workshop. I believe that 2022 will see onward progress toward tackling challenges and bettering the community.

Allow me to highlight just a few of the accomplishments in 2021.

Public Safety

Public safety has always been a priority of the City. In fact, while many elected officials were distancing themselves from the police, we embraced the men and women that wear the El Cajon uniform.

We know that our residents expect us to support those that are protecting our community.

In the meeting just a few hours ago, the City Council unanimously agreed to add an additional ten officers to our ranks. This will allow the City to bring on talented police officers from other departments (especially the City of San Diego) that have taken the politically motivated position of discarding their unvaccinated employees.

It is important to state, we do not support vaccine mandates or other excessive regulations on our employees.

From the policies and practices emanating from the State's capital, it seems like many are embracing lawlessness. It is El Cajon's position that we do not accept lawlessness. Rather, we support a proactive and strong law enforcement strategy.

Homelessness

Homelessness continues to impact our community. This issue also continues to be a priority of the City Council. We have taken a two-pronged approach to addressing this issue. First, we believe that our citizens expect us to enforce the law. As such, we will do so. Second, we believe in providing help to those that seek it.

In the past year, despite the State's reckless legislation that continues to perpetuate an endless state of homelessness, the City continued its proactive clean-up of illegal open drug scenes and deplorable living conditions.

In 2021, we cleaned up 390 tons of trash left behind from these locations and have power-washed 26 encampment areas.

Also, in 2021, our programs helped provide 766 homeless individuals with temporary shelter—201 of those individuals have found permanent housing through our programs. Since 2017, the City has provided temporary shelter to over 3,000 individuals and has connected over 800 of these folks with permanent housing.

This has been accomplished because of our relationship with tremendous partners:

- ECLTC with their temporary shelter programs, permanent housing programs, and many other services;
- Home Start, which operates our housing navigation and housing assistance programs; and
- The Salvation Army, which created and operates the “A Way Back Home” program.

Please join me in thanking these amazing organizations.

I strongly believe we need to remain focused on the issue of homelessness—we need to continue to be compassionate while also meeting the expectations of our residents.

However, I am convinced that we will never resolve homelessness until we honestly characterize the politically motivated policies that keep many in a state of homelessness.

Until the State of California allows us to address root problems, I am sad to say that the conditions we see around us will remain largely unchanged.

Incomprehensively, too many believe that it is humane to allow individuals to destroy themselves with a slow and miserable death at the hands of illegal drugs. These same individuals, many of them representing us in Sacramento, also believe it is compassionate to allow mentally ill citizens to wander in states of psychosis and delusions through streets and alleys of our communities.

Citizens of California need to stand up to these inhumane policies and allow local governments to help these individuals through programs that can actually make a difference. I also call on the County of San Diego to start putting the millions of dollars they have received for homelessness to work in our community. For far too long the County has held these funds while standing on the sidelines, watching us struggle.

Economic Development

In mid-2020, during the height of the pandemic, as many businesses were forced to remain closed and struggled to survive, the City distributed nearly \$2.5 million in grants. I am proud to say that this year, the City has implemented a second round of business grants, with \$5 million available to bolster our local economy by lifting up businesses and getting people back to work.

Since this second grant was launched back in May, nearly \$3 million in funding has been expended. This includes assisting 216 businesses. An astounding 270 employees have been hired by businesses and capital improvements can be seen throughout the City.

We have worked hard to encourage development in the City. While we are doing this, the County of San Diego has been attempting to counteract our efforts. I am proud that the City Council stood up to the majority of the Board of Supervisor’s ill-conceived idea of an ordinance that would hurt over 300 of El Cajon’s businesses. We need to continue to push back on the County’s dangerous policies.

Whether it be:

- half-baked policies from the County,
- business-killing COVID policies from the State, or
- the growing anti-business sentiment permeating from Washington D.C.,

be assured that the City of El Cajon will be fighting for our businesses.

I know that we will continue our innovative approaches to economic development. We have a talented staff and strong business partners, who can make a difference in the upcoming year. We are also in the process of developing a comprehensive economic development strategy to build off of the investments made in our community.

I look forward to supporting the big ideas that will have positive economic impacts for years to come.

Miscellaneous

Before I talk about the budget, allow me to highlight a few more accomplishments from this past year.

I am happy to report that the City Council adopted an Election Integrity policy.

We have extended the relaxation of business regulations and continue to allow outdoor dining, which has helped our economy regain footing after the pandemic.

We have strategically utilized American Rescue Act funds for programs such as Dollar Days (idea from Councilmember Steve Goble) where residents can participate in recreation programs for only \$1, investments in the City's infrastructure, and promoting economic development.

Budget

A foundational value of our City Council is to ensure the fiscal health of our City. That being said, I am happy to report that the state of the City's economic health is **solid**.

We went into the pandemic planning for the worst. In anticipation, the City instituted a hiring freeze, cut the budget where we could, and sought to bolster our economy by not shutting down businesses.

I am proud to say that our efforts, along with a robust economic boon in El Cajon, have resulted in more revenue than anticipated. Rather than experiencing a loss, the City collected about \$9 million more than projected.

We have pro-actively set aside \$53 million in rainy day funds. With an annual General Fund budget of about \$84 million, this is the most reserves the City has ever had.

Finally, before we look ahead to 2022, I would be remiss if I did not highlight some of the great events that took place this year.

The City held the first-ever Foodie Fest in September—organized in partnership with the East County Chamber of Commerce, the Downtown Partnership, and St. Madeline. This unique event brought local restaurants and community members together in our Downtown. I am pleased to inform you all that the restaurant owners that participated reported an uptick in business since the event!

In October, Hauntfest returned to downtown El Cajon, providing a fun and safe way for residents and visitors to celebrate the spooky season.

And this past Saturday, Wells Park was turned into a Winter Wonderland where families got to play in real snow.

We also participated in the Christmas Tree Lighting ceremony, an event that brings together many of our residents counting down the lighting of the tree and singing as a community.

Foodie Fest, Hauntfest, and the Winter Wonderland are just a few examples that demonstrate the City's commitment to put on large scale, family-friendly events, for which El Cajon is known.

NEXT YEAR

Now, looking ahead to 2022.

As we come together in January to develop our work plan for next year, I hope that we continue with many of the same core priorities. We need to continue our effort to:

- increase public safety,
- protect our businesses,
- keep our city clean and safe, and
- proactively bring new development and revenue streams.

I do want to acknowledge that me and the City Council are just a part of the well run organization we call the City of El Cajon. I want to thank our city manager Graham Mitchell, his entire executive team, and our wonderful staff. I also want to acknowledge and thank our public safety leaders, our Fire Chief Steve Swaney and our Police Chief Mike Moulton.

In conclusion, I am excited for our City. I am pleased that we have weathered storms and are poised to take on any other challenges that may come our way. I encourage our community to be engaged and join us in solving the challenges discussed tonight.

Again, thank you all for coming, thank you for being a part of our community, and I look forward to 2022.